

In 1956-71 checklist, p. 139

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Who gives a damn?

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Department of the Environment,
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Who really cares about air pollution, anyway?

Oh, there's a lot of talk. But talk is cheap. What's being done?

After all, we have to breathe about 22,000 times a day. If what we take in is loaded with junk our bodies don't need and shouldn't have, then what we're fooling around with is not just a matter of health, but survival.

So the trick is to keep it under control, at levels our bodies can tolerate.

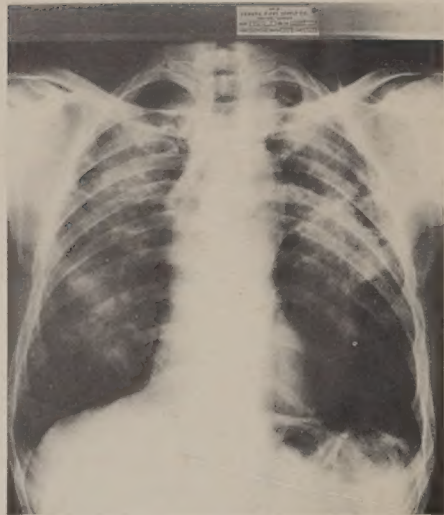
That's what this booklet is about. What air pollution is, the problems it creates and precisely what the Ontario government is doing about it.

First, let's define it.

If there's anything in the air that causes discomfort or endangers health; injures plants or animals; ruins the enjoyment of property; interferes with normal vision; that's air pollution. It comes from industry where we work, from the cars and buses we use, from the trash we burn in huge open dumps and in our back yards. These, and many more, produce what are called contaminants.

Just what are these contaminants? Mostly they're smoke particles, dusts, and poisonous chemical fumes like sulphur dioxide. Then there's carbon monoxide and hydrocarbons from car exhausts. Plus a terrible array of other gases.

Air pollution can and does reduce your visibility. It soils clothing, corrodes metals, cracks rubber. It injures or totally destroys crops.



Costly and wasteful as these effects are, they're nothing compared to what it does to our health. Our children, our old people and those with throat or lung ailments are especially vulnerable. For the rest of us, prolonged exposure to even moderate pollution may be dangerous, and no one is sure how much we can take.

What to do?

First, get a clear tough law on the books. We've got it. The Environmental Protection Act, 1971, is the most effective piece of legislation of its kind in North America. Even the most impatient anti-pollutors will tell you that.

Our department, which is called Department of the Environment, is charged with enforcing the act in Ontario. That means we have central control over all sources of air pollution. The branch specifically concerned with air pollution is Air Management.

The branch is divided into six sections: Abatement, Approvals and Criteria, Air Quality and Meteorology, Automotive Emissions Control, Phytotoxicology, Laboratory. We work closely with the Dept. of Health.

We have divided the province into seven regions. Each is subdivided into districts and headed by a Regional Engineer. Each district is staffed by qualified engineers and inspectors. Right now there are fifteen regional and district offices across Ontario.

The first job in every district is to pinpoint the pollution sources. The worst offenders are dealt with first.

It works like this:

The owner of the source is handed a written report. The report outlines the controls required under the Act, gives him a time period to install the controls and a further period in which he can apply for a Certificate of Approval.

We enforce the Act with reason. But if pollutors refuse to co-operate with controls, we take them to court. If convicted, they are liable to fines of up to \$2000 for a person, \$5000 for a company.

The other five sections study control methods, measure pollution, check anti-pollution devices on cars, study crop damage, and analyse everything affected by all air pollutants. Probably the best known of our efforts is the Air Pollution Index and Alert System. It goes into effect as soon as certain pollutant levels are reached and the forecast says that

stagnant weather will continue or increase those levels. The Index is fed to the news media four times a day.

When the Index reaches 32, the Minister of the Environment warns operators of major pollution sources to get ready to cut back.

At 50, he may order them to do so. At 100, he can stop every source that isn't vital to public health and safety.

And that, very briefly, is what the government of Ontario is doing about air pollution. If you want more detailed information, please contact us.

Meantime, we hope we've given you a rough idea about our air pollution control. Heaven knows, it's not perfect. We get very frustrated at times. We do make mistakes. But we certainly give a damn, and a great deal more.

Is it enough?

No it isn't. We need help. We need it from you.

There are a number of practical things you can do right now and all by yourself.

Keep your car tuned. Keep your furnace in top working order. Walk or use public transport whenever you can. Don't burn rubbish or leaves. There's plenty more you can do and it all helps. So if we can help you help yourself, please ask about that, too.

Write or call:

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